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Importance of Yoga in Indian Philosophy

Amit Singh

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Philosophy, C.M.P. Degree College University of Allahabad, Prayagraj

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ABSTRACT

Yoga is the practice that creates harmony between body, mind, and spirit to live a peaceful life. The beauty of yoga poses various attributes that you don't need to be yogi to reap the benefits. Whatever the age you are in, yoga has the power to calm your mind and strengthen your body. In ancient times, many Hindu yogis practiced challenging yoga asana to achieve Moksha. In recent years, yoga has upsurge in popularity, and many practitioners practice yoga poses like Hatha Yoga, Vinyasa Yoga, Ashtanga Yoga to attain liberation. To reunite your body, mind, and spirit is essential to understand the philosophical aspect of yoga to practice different yoga asanas for achieving moksha. Indian philosophies are based on Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta. These are the six Darshanas or Philosophy, which describe the real meaning of life to attain liberation.

KEYWORDS: yoga, Indian, philosophy, importance, hindu, liberation, ancient, harmony, mind, body, spirit.

Introduction

Each six philosophy systems differ from each other, and founders made their own philosophical knowledge. It is essential to understand how sages of the highest order devoted their lives to the study and propagation of philosophy. These six philosophies are, also called Darshana.

Nyaya – Sage Gautama founded the Nyaya School. Nyaya is considered a dividend for all philosophical inquiries, which means “rules.” According to this philosophy, there are four methods of knowledge [1,2]

- (1) Pratyakasha (intuition),
- (2) Anumana (inference),
- (3) Upasana (comparison)
- (4) Shabda (verbal testimony)

Vaisesika – The sage Kanada Kashyapa found this Vaisesika Darshana in the period of 6th to 2nd century BC. The word derived from “Vishesa,” which means particularity.

Sankhya – Sankhya Darshana is an enumeration philosophy to gain knowledge on three of six “pramanas,” which means proofs. Yogic sage Kapila found this.

Yoga – Yogic sage Patanjali founded yoga, and it is an add-on Sankhya Darshana. It has developed to create a union between mind, body, and spirit.

Mimamsa – Mimamsa means “reflection” and derived from the root “Man.” Jaimini founded it in the 4th century BC.

Vedanta – Vedanta is the extension of the Sankhya system, which explains the Upanishads of Indian philosophy. Sage Badaryana is an Indian philosopher who wrote Vedanta.

These six philosophies generally discuss the knowledge and existence of Brahman means “creator.” All these Darshana are not so famous in an earlier time, but yoga gave them alias that many people all around the world embrace through practice.[3,4]

The six philosophies now play a vital role in removing pain and suffering while practicing yoga. These darshans help to achieve moksha or reunite the body, mind, and soul. Moreover, these six Indian Orthodox philosophies are real pathfinders and help you to understand the real meaning of life. That's the reason philosophy in yoga is essential to gain liberation.

Discussion

The main philosophy of yoga is simple: mind, body, and spirit are all one and cannot be clearly separated. Yet, there is a multitude of philosophical ideas that are helpful to explore the deeper dimensions of the body, mind, and spirit. Studying and understanding these ideas are essential to shift our view as ourselves as separate, to realizing the unitive state.

Yoga philosophy, similar to Buddhism, believes that spiritual ignorance creates suffering and binds us to the wheel of samsara (cycle of rebirth). The removal of our ignorance can take many different paths and techniques in yoga. Still, the central philosophical teachings of yoga revolve around the practice of mental discernment, detachment, spiritual knowledge, and self-awareness.

The different paths of yoga utilize various aspects of Sankhya dualism and Upanishadic non-dualism. Some paths like Tantra and Bhakti, utilize the forms of Hinduism's gods and goddesses. In addition, Patanjali's yoga sutras incorporate the concept of Ishvara—a personal god. Thus, a yogi should understand both the relationships between atman and brahman, prakriti and purusha, and the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.[5,6]

The law of karma is central to the philosophy of yoga. Karma is the glue that attaches us to the wheel of samsara, which perpetuates our suffering and the delusion of maya. Maya is the “illusion or ignorance” that creates the veil between our ego and our unitive experience of the universe.

These foundational world views can be confusing to Westerners but are helpful to reorientate our minds to be able to see and experience the interconnection of all things.

Yoga philosophy also incorporates the concepts of the subtle body and the spiritual energies of prana and kundalini moving through the nadis and chakras. Hatha yoga is especially steeped in the concepts of this energy anatomy.[7,8]

The ultimate goal of Yoga is a sustained state of pure awareness called Moksha or Samadhi. Yoga is the transcendence of the mind to realize the “true self” or “highest self.” This experience of pure consciousness is our true nature. In this state of liberation, all mental and philosophical constructs fall away. In essence, yogic philosophy is a necessary means to deepen one's yoga practice and to reach enlightenment.

Results

History of Yoga: Detail information

1. Pre-Vedic Period

In Pre -Vedic India number of signs of yoga were seen in Indus-Saraswati valley civilization. It developed around 3300–1300 BCE in Northern India.

2. Vedic period (1700–500 BCE) Vedas are sacred scripture of Brahmanism which contains Hymns, Mantras, and Rituals. Rig-Veda the oldest holy Hindu scripture in which word 'YOGA' used first time in a Hymn. In Atharvaveda, A group of ascetic called Vratya are to be shown doing some bodily postures which have evolved into Physical exercises in today's world. In the Vedic period, Rishis or Yogis was called by Vedic people to share their spiritual and yogic knowledge with them. It's known as Vedic Yoga. The aim of Vedic Yoga was to Yajna (Sacrifice) of the individual's body and soul to unite with the supreme God by practice Tapas, Asana, and Samadhi.[9]

3. Pre-classical Period (500-200 BCE)

Pre-classical Yoga begins when Brahmins and Rishis start emerging Yoga concepts (which were in the air till date) in Upanishads & scripture like Bhagavad Gita.

In Hindu religion early writing on Pre-classical Yoga was written in Katha Upanishad along with 200 other scriptures.

Katha Upanishad describes Yoga as a connector bridge between mind and soul constituents. This connection can be attained with the practice of physical posture, restraining breath and focus mind meditatively at a silent place.

Bhagavad Gita describes Yoga in a variety of ways through Karma Yoga (Action), Bhakti Yoga (Devotion) and Jnana Yoga (Knowledge).

In Buddhism, A systematic and comprehensive study on the Yoga-related concept shown in Pali Canon (A collection of Buddhist scriptures written in Pali language).

4. Classical Period (200 BCE – 500 CE)

The classical period witnessed for the beginning of systematic and comprehensive methods, ideas, techniques and practices of Yoga. Classic Yoga consists the Patanjali's organized knowledge from Brahmins and Rishi-Munis of the Vedic-period.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is a collection of 196 sutra containing methods and different theories of Yoga. Patanjali Yoga is also called Raja Yoga, i.e., Yoga to get control over your mind and emotions.

Ashtanga Yoga which elaborates steps and stages to obtain Samadhi state, also derived from Patanjali's writings.

5. Post-classical Period

Post-classical Yoga's main focus was to live in the current moment and accept the reality rather than strive to liberate a person from existence. Scripture of the post-classical period called Bhagavata Purana describes a form of Yoga called Viraha (Separation) from the physical world and concentrate on the Krishna (God). Hence, the earlier time of yogis in Post-classical Period was gone meditation

and contemplation. Later on, different Yoga masters refused ancient teaching of Yoga and probed the hidden powers of the physical body to achieve enlightenment. As Vedas teaching has now converted into the development of physical body and so Tantra Yoga began with this.

6. Modern Period

The modern period started in the late 18th century when Indian masters start sowing Yoga's seed to western countries.[10]

18th Century

A disciple of saint Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, was the first Yogi to influence the western people about Yoga. In 1893, Vivekananda's speech in Chicago Parliament of the World Religions spread long-lasting impression on the American public about Yoga. Other Yoga Gurus was Paramahansa Yogananda who represented India in 1920's International Congress of Religious Liberals in Boston US. His different techniques of meditation and Kriya Yoga made his millions of followers in western and India. His founded organization was Self-Realization Fellowship.

19th Century

As Yoga has been usually synonym with Asana in the west, many Yoga Gurus started work on Hatha Yoga to propagate their teachings in the western culture. During the 1920s and 1930s two most prominent yoga gurus in India were T. Krishnamacharya and Swami Sivananda.

T. Krishnamacharya also called as the father of modern Yoga was the revival of Hatha Yoga. Krishnamacharya opened a first Yoga school in Mysore under the patronage of King in 1931. Some of the most renowned students of T. Krishnamacharya are B.K.S. Iyengar, T.K.V. Desikachar, and Pattabhi Jois. They became the famous Yoga teacher in the west, continued his legacy and increase the popularity of Hatha Yoga.

B.K.S. Iyengar is the founder of 'Iyengar Yoga.' Krishnamacharya was the brother-in-law of B.K.S. Iyengar so that he encouraged Iyengar to learn Yoga at the early stage of their life.

T.K.V. Desikachar was the son of Krishnamacharya. He is the founder of Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram (KYM), a yoga therapy clinic and yoga center in Madras. He taught a form of Yoga known as vinyasa yoga all around the world.

Swami Sivananda was a proponent of Yoga and Vedanta. He founded divine life society (DLS) in Rishikesh and published more than 200 books on Yoga. His book contains the practical application of Yoga philosophy over theoretical knowledge.

Apart from Hatha yoga, Kundalini yoga was also introduced around 1969 in the USA by Swami Satchidananda and Yogi Bhajan.[11]

Conclusions

Yoga is a very vast science of life & understanding it through only a single approach would be impossible for a person. The ancient yogis had worked to simplify yoga teaching. Apart from just physical styles of yoga, they developed six branches of yoga. These six branches have unique characteristics, philosophies, practices & functions to approach life through yoga. It is possible to practice more than one branch together, as all have one single goal – self-realization.

1. Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga is the foundation of modern Yoga and translates as ‘the yoga of force.’ Physical postures of hatha yoga are designed in a way to balance ‘Sun’ (Ha) & ‘Moon’ (tha) energies in the body.

2. Tantra Yoga

Tantra yoga is the ritualistic approach to bring equanimity between body & mind. Humans body and mind are cyclic and compulsiveness in nature. This behavior of the human’s body and mind keeps us trapped in the limitations.[12]

Tantra Yoga is made up to go beyond these limitations and provides a platform to control energies from the subtle body.

3. Karma Yoga

Karma yoga is the pathway to selfless action. According to karma philosophy, every action is served as an offering to the divine (God) without any outcome desired. Karma yoga is something you can practice out of mat anytime, anywhere.

4. Bhakti Yoga

This branch is the spiritual path of yoga in which a practitioner devotes all actions to a chosen deity. Bhakti yoga develops the feeling of love & compassion for other beings. According to Bhakti philosophy surrendering ourselves towards divine & will reach us the ultimate goal of yoga, i.e., Self-realization. Click here to know more about [bhakti yoga & its practice method](#). [13]

5. Jnana yoga

This branch of yoga is all about developing inwardly through acquired Knowledge, practice, wisdom & life experience. Jnana yoga practices self-observance to evolve seeker to know the truth of ‘Who I am.’ In this way, a practitioner can distinguish the duality of Truth-untruth.

6. Raja Yoga

Raja or ‘King’ is the branch of yoga that let us control over our mind very consciously and eliminate vritti (thought-patterns) created in our mind. It comprises many mindfulness techniques, austerity & physical poses to focus the mind at one point (Dharna – Concentration). It unfolds the eight limbs path described in Patanjali’s yoga sutra.[14]

Yoga Benefits

We need a reason each time before starting a new thing & yoga gives us a thousand reasons to start it. Yoga works at the very subtle cell to a complicated organ of the body.[15]

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